

\$25M in Housing Assistance Announced Roberts and Moran Visit Fort Riley to Make Announcement

By Amanda Kim Stairrett
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FORT RILEY -- U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, R-Kan., joined U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, R-Kan.; Maj. Gen. Dennis Hardy, commander 24th Infantry Division (Mech.) and Fort Riley; Gilbert Gonzales, USDA acting undersecretary; Linda Hoeffner, deputy garrison commander; and Chuck Banks, Kansas USDA Rural Development director, to announce \$25 million in guaranteed lending assistance through USDA's Rural Housing program this morning at Headquarters, 24th Infantry Division.

The program will help troops purchase and build homes in rural communities close to Fort Riley. Roberts said Banks determined that close to 100 communities in 11 counties surrounding Fort Riley could and would likely serve as homes for troops when they relocate. The funding will provide assistance to more than 7,500 individuals and family members who will relocate to the region during 2006.

"This commitment represents one of USDA and Rural Housing's finest hours," Robert said. "It is a prime example of why we even have a Rural Development division within the Department of Agriculture."

The \$25 million is dedicated solely to housing for military and civilian employees and their families who will come to Fort Riley.

The program will assist low and middle income soldiers and their families and civilian workers by providing 100 percent financing to purchase a house in a small rural community -- a community of 20,000 or fewer people. The funding is intended to help address the projected housing shortage resulting from the additional troops headed to Fort Riley, according to a press release from Roberts' office.

"When we first learned that these troops and their families, and civilian workers and their families, nearly 8,000 to 9,000 people total, would be coming to this area, we understood that one of the biggest challenges we would face would be to provide adequate housing," Roberts said.

Roberts said this program represented one of the biggest opportunities for economic development that many of Kansas' rural communities have ever experienced, and the positive results will make a difference statewide as well. He said rural banks, local school districts, county and local tax bases, retail and other local businesses and quality of life for soldiers would be affected. Gonzales said that Rural Development was one of a few agencies that could build a city from the ground up.

Moran said that when cities like Junction City, Manhattan, Abilene, Chapman and Clay Center were considering growth, housing was at the top of the list. Every city with a population up to 20,000 will be eligible for the Rural Housing program, according to the USDA.

He also announced that Fort Riley will provide up to \$20,000 to help refurbish space for the Rural Development office.

"We ought to call it General Dennis Hardy's One-Stop Shopping Housing Center for our troops," Roberts joked.

Hardy said this morning's agreement would help care for soldiers and their families.

Roberts and Moran kidded each other about helping the program set up in its new office.

"If you need help, Congressman Moran and I will volunteer," Roberts said. "I'll drive the truck, and obviously, Jerry, you can unload it."